The Ballad Of Brixton Gaol

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I came to Brixton on remand in Nineteen Eighty-Three,
An amateurish blagger on a charge of robbery,
This wasn't quite the first time I'd had trouble with the law,
But no way did I ever think I'd come back here, for sure.

Now thirteen long years have gone by, and times have changed in clink,
There's no slop-bucket in your cell, and no more dreadful stink,
There's no more emptying of foul excreta down the sluice
At unlock in the morning to upset your gastric juice.

There's telephones and showers on the wing, unlike before,
But even with the changing times an inmate's deal is raw;
It's bang-up here on A Wing for most folk most of the time,
Including for remands who plead "Not guilty" to a crime.

Drug testing is an obsession, and twice I've now had this,
On such occasions the screws literally take the piss,
I've heard of people failing tests and losing their remission,
But drugs have no appeal for somebody in my position.

The new régime is quite relaxed, there's women screws as well,
A rub-down search from one of them, and prison ain't such hell!
Though Brixton's Hell for some all right, but in their private way,
I saw a fellow go to his on A Wing one sad day.

From the Induction Unit recess came a chilling screech,
Newly convicted, poor wretch doused his head with boiling bleach;
They wrapped him in a blanket and flew him out mighty quick,
He came back on the Hospital but 'twas his mind was sick.

Poor fellow slashed his wrists with phone cards as he lay in bed,
Twelve years he'd got, and a *Dear John*, so he was better dead,
Or so he thought, and so do others, here and there they try,
But while there's life there's hope, and there are better ways to die.

Some things about the place have changed but others stay the same,
Some do their bird without a care, some with a sense of shame;
In these infernal places every story is unique,
Of evil men and gullible, the stupid and the weak,

And aye, the innocent, for Brixton has its share of them,
Indifferent to the screws, they speak of the police with phlegm,
The traveller entrapped by Customs with a cache of *coke*,
The businessman whose depositions read like a sick joke,

And countless petty criminals who've been framed and deceived,
Who hold their tongues at trial fearful that they won't be believed.
At exercise in bitter cold, recrimination's lost,
Guilty and guiltless, young and old, bemoan and count the cost.

And so do I, of misspent youth, but I've no tears to shed,
Unlike the man on A Wing I would rather not be dead,
For life, though it be cruel and short is precious still to me,
Far more so than it was an age ago in Eighty-Three.

There'll come the day I pass through Brixton's grim walls the last time,
A wiser, sadder and more bitter man than in my prime,
And vow that whate'er happens I will not return again;
How many others in my place have sung that same refrain?

And how many have come to grief when barely through the gate?
And ultimately who can swear he'll never share their fate?
And e'en a hundred years from now it's "There but for the grace..."
That every man who leaves will come back to this curséd place.